



Culinary Corner

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REVIEW



Lunch at The Coffee Cup includes favorites such as fried chicken, fried grouper, country-style steak and a host of vegetables and sides.

THE COFFEE CUP

★★★★ out of 5

Location: 914 Clarkson St.

Phone: 704-375-8855; Fax: 704-375-8857

Price range: \$3.95-\$10.95.

Hours: Monday through Friday, 6 a.m.-4 p.m.;

Saturday 6 a.m.-1 p.m.

Details: Breakfast and lunch only; restaurant is available for private parties; catering; Panthers tailgate fare; free delivery for orders exceeding \$30.

For details: Visit www.coffeecupsoul.com.

order tea and sweeten it with sugar, but it's just not the same."

Sweet tea at the ready, we ordered chicken and waffles, country-style steak and fried pork chop breakfast platters, each accompanied by two eggs, biscuits or toast, and grits or potatoes, as well as sides of livermush, fatback and country ham.

A plate of hot, freshly baked biscuits came first. Thinner than we expected, they tasted of baking powder and butter – a flavorful combination. Michael took photographs of each plate as it arrived. "This is what we do," Jane said with a laugh as she waited patiently until the country ham she had been served had been adjusted on the plate for its photo shoot. The country ham was thick and hard to cut with a fork, so we wrapped it inside the biscuits – it was one of the Sterns' favorites. Fatback and livermush arrived in tandem. The three long strips of fat-

Bobby Cochran/CW photos

Take 'em to The Cup

Piece of Charlotte's history faces uncertain future

by Heidi Billotto
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The Coffee Cup restaurant has been at home in Charlotte since 1947, neatly settled on a corner at 914 Clarkson St., just blocks away from Bank of America Stadium. For the past 60 years, The Cup has seen many changes, but none as dramatic as those recently proposed by Beazer Homes, an Atlanta-based development corporation. Beazer now owns about 20 acres of land in the area, including the land occupied by The Coffee Cup. Beazer wants to clear the area for a residential development; the company's plans do not include preservation of The Coffee Cup as a restaurant on the site. Without any intervention, demolition of the building could begin as early as December.

"A lot of Charlotte's history has been destroyed in the name of urban renewal," said Gardine Wilson, owner of The Cup, who purchased the establishment with business partner Anthony McGarver in 2003. Although they own the business and the original signage, they do not own the building or the property.

Food preservatives

The Coffee Cup was the first all-white Charlotte restaurant to be fully integrated before desegregation and has continued to be a common ground for people of all ethnic backgrounds and economic levels. Open daily, The Cup serves up heaping homemade portions of soul

food for breakfast and lunch.

"I got into this because I was interested in preserving the history of the business," said Wilson. "Businessmen and women bring someone to The Cup when they really want to see what people are like outside of the office. People can come here, relax, let their hair down and just be."

Many celebrities have eaten at The Cup, which enjoys a national reputation. The establishment has been named one of the top five soul food restaurants in the United States by Essence Magazine and one of the best in the Southeast by the Travel Channel. When the Food Network's Bobby Flay visited The Coffee Cup in 2002, he noted that the restaurant was a classic place, straight out of the '60s.

Two for the road, three for breakfast

Recently food writers Jane and Michael Stern were in town for the 2006 Novello Festival and wanted to meet for breakfast at a restaurant with "some local color."

The Sterns, who have made a living eating at and writing about regional American restaurants, have published several books and cookbooks including their first and most noted, a guide to regional American cuisine called "Roadfood," and, most recently, "Two for the Road." They also write a monthly column for Gourmet Magazine and appear weekly on NPR's Splendid Table with Lynn Rossetta Kasper, heard locally on WFAE-FM.

"There is just something about Southern iced tea; it seems to surge through your veins," described Jane. "You just can't get it anywhere outside the South. You can



The fried pork chops are this food writer's favorite entrée at The Cup for breakfast with eggs and grits or lunch with pintos and green beans.

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Familiar faces at The Cup include, from left, Gardine Wilson, Linda McDonald, Chris Ford, Rashon Campbell, Mykial McLymore and Jeff Miller.

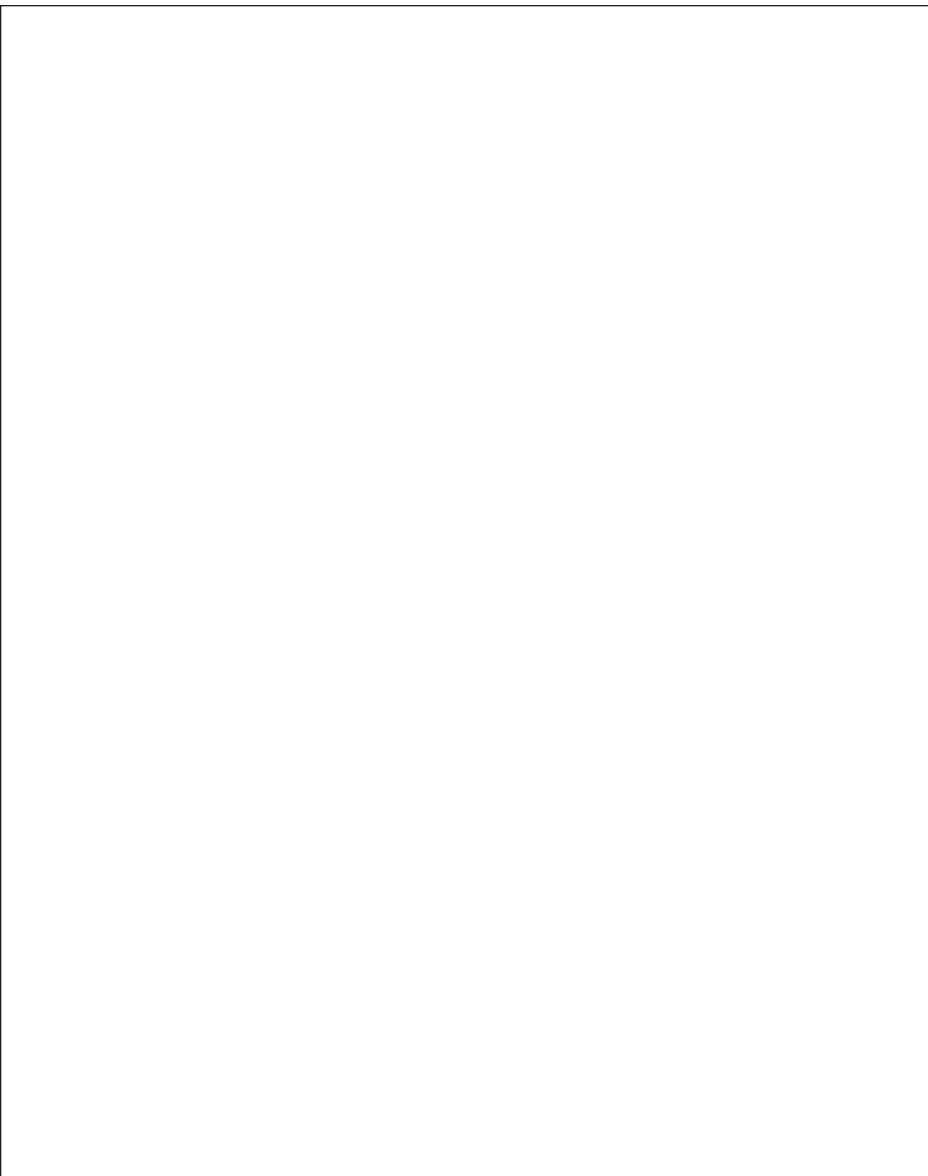
back were good, salty, and much like eating warm fried pork rinds. The livermush was a bit too thick and tender for my taste. I think this local cousin to bulk-fried sausage, liver pudding or scrapple is best when it is thinly sliced and fried very crispy.

We were warned that the chicken and pork chops would take 30 minutes to prepare, but we had plenty to munch on while we waited. The pork chops were the top pick of the morning with the chicken and waffles a close second. The country-style

steak was warm and filling and tasted like pot roast.

At lunch, The Cup serves the same selection of meats as well as fried grouper and whiting, T-bone steak and a variety of daily specials. Each meat is served with a choice of two sides. My favorites are the collard greens, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, green beans, pintos and yams. Homemade cornbread and fresh-baked biscuits accompany each meal.

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A pensive Gardine Wilson awaits Monday night's decision from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.

The Cup

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To read Jane and Michael Stern's take on The Coffee Cup, visit their Web site, www.roadfood.com.

What fate awaits?

On Monday, Nov. 13, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission will meet at 7 p.m. to decide the fate of The Coffee Cup. The commission could recommend that the building be designated a historic property and forward the decision to City Council. The commission could make a decision for a stay of demolition or decide to recommend acceptance of one of Beazer's proposals, which is to recreate the façade of the building and use it as a bus stop in the new development. The survey committee of the commission has already voted down the latter proposal, but the idea could be revisited. A decision for a stay of demolition or designation as a historic landmark will buy Wilson the time he needs to continue to negotiate, giving The Coffee Cup 180 or 365 more days of security, respectively.

"What we need here is a win-win situa-

tion for the city," said Wilson, who has collected more than 10,000 petition signatures to keep The Coffee Cup a thriving business on the site. Wilson also has applied to have the building designated a historic landmark by City Council.

"It's got to mean something that this many individuals have come in here to sign (the petition) over the course of the last six weeks," he said. "It's been very humbling to have this much support from the Charlotte community. Charlotte is a business town and people sometimes make decisions about growth without really considering what the people here want to see happen."

According to Wilson, he has recently entered into negotiations with Beazer and another real estate development company, The Conformity Corporation, to see if all interested parties can find some sort of middle ground. Wilson would like the opportunity to purchase the land for The Coffee Cup or have City Council purchase the plot of land, through eminent domain, to preserve the business as a historic landmark.

"It doesn't do a city any good to accept growth without continuing to preserve its heritage," said Wilson. □